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## DEPRESSION

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by  
Anne Coghill

I am glad of the opportunity to talk about depression in the second part of life. My own urge towards growth began soon after I was forty. Finding the technique that would help me was for many years a problem. Long years of analysis with three analysts of different persuasions left me with some experience of the power of counter-transference to block development (they were all younger than I was) but with no conviction that they were able to accept my aggression. As I had been conditioned as a child to believe that spontaneous activity was highly destructive, my frustration can be imagined. It was at this point that I came into contact with the Association for Humanistic Psychology. As I read of their beliefs in the development of human potential, I thought with joy: 'This is for me' and I joined Quaesitor's first nine month intensive course.

Up to now I had been frustrated but not depressed. I quickly learnt in encounter groups, the importance of experiencing the basic feeling of rage and pain (as opposed to talking about them as in my analysis) but it was not until I entered the co-counselling community that I at

last became convinced of the necessity of taking down the barricades and learnt the techniques which would help me to do so. First came the rage, then the pain and with it, depression or rather despair and the experience of a world in which nothing was good. I even felt one Christmas that I had taken the colour out of the world, when it was white with snow.

Perhaps one of the most surprising factors to emerge was that of the deprived child. Brought up in a secure if over-protective environment, I began to get in touch with the despairing child. 'This began to occur outside the co-counselling session. I would seek a place alone and sit rocking myself while cries unlike anything I had ever experienced, rose up from my solar plexus. The tears were no longer the more superficial ones of self pity or frustration but pure pain. Afterwards, the tension went and I was able to work more freely.

I have had one great advantage. From early on in my first analysis, I had a dream. I was in a valley full of grass and trees. The earth on which I stood was shaken by a distant cement factory which

covered the rich foliage with grey dust. I decided to climb out of the valley and pulled myself up the steep bank, hanging onto the moist blades of couch grass. At the top of the hill, I saw stretching away for miles and miles, dun-coloured tops of hills, like ripples in the sand. Only in the far distance was there a brilliantly coloured scene of blue sky, golden sands and a blue-green sea, flecked with white. I realised for the first time that a journey lay ahead of me and that it was going to be a long one. That dream has been a beacon to me during the most arduous parts of the journey when despair threatened to take all meaning from my life.

Becoming aware of processes of growth within myself has made me aware of similar processes in others. For example, a woman of eighty two is experiencing intense despair and the fear she encountered in childhood but repressed during her earlier adult life. It is a long and arduous process, already lasting one year, but she has also taken positive initiatives which she could not take before. Two women in their seventies are re-experiencing the pain and loss destroyed in the holocaust. A woman who died at eighty nine, spent her eighties ridding herself of her mother's advice that she must always dress in sober clothes. She finally turned up in hospital with a bright pink shorty dressing gown. Although a loving person who gave much, she also suffered all her life from intense irritability.

We assume too easily that depr-

ession in the old is due to the process of growing old and to fear of death. It may also be due to a much delayed dynamic process of inner growth. Very little is known about these processes although they affect both mental and physical health. For example it is possible that men's lives are shorter (one in seven women are widows in the U.K.) not because they are the weaker sex but because their defenses are that much stronger so that when the process of inner growth starts in later life, the conflict is a sharp one, provoking life-threatening levels of stress.

How to deal with depression? Living alone is a particular problem during this period because supportive relationships are essential. Co-counselling friends who understand are invaluable. Having simple practical jobs to do also helps. I run a small voluntary society and answering letters helps me to feel that I am relating positively in a way that doesn't make too many demands. Knowledge of being on a journey helps enormously.

What are the advantages of working through and becoming whole? I have more physical energy, in spite of my age. I was conscious of fatigue during most of my early adult life. I am losing my sense of inferiority: instead I am beginning to see that there may be good things within myself, that they are not always only out there. The taking in of projections makes life and its problems so much simpler to deal with, but I am seventy four. Surely these

problems should be worked through in childhood? What unnecessary suffering and what loss of creative action are we engendering by disregarding children's needs to develop emotionally as well as physically and intellectually? Drama, role-playing, open discussions of children's experiences would all help. What for

instance does it feel like to be a scape-goat? How many men who commit murder were silent children at school? What sort of satisfaction do children gain from being a vandal? The answers to these questions it is vital for us to know. Kenneth Baker, please note!



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